

## **Readings: Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45; Isaiah 53:4-12**

### **A servant not a celebrity**

It is very appealing to want to be seen as someone important, like a king or a celebrity, with everyone making a fuss of you.

In our Gospel reading we find James and John wanting to have lots of glory and fuss and the best position in heaven, sitting right next to Jesus – celebrities in the Kingdom of God. Later, Jesus pointed out that the local politicians and officials acted very arrogantly, lorded it over people and threw their weight around, a little power going quickly to their heads. A desire for fame, power and glory is nothing new. There is plenty of pressure in our society to want these things. The media nurtures this desire for celebrity by making it appear within the reach of ordinary people.

### **A servant gets dirty**

Jesus told his friends they had to live a different way. Here's how he put it: "It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not to be served – and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage." Instead of being a celebrity, Jesus' followers should make it their goal to be servants or slaves. He could tell his friends to do this, because that was what he also did, moving into our neighbourhood, not to be served, but to serve. If anyone had the right to be a celebrity, the Son of Man did. Instead, he chose to be a servant. This command is still true for Jesus' friends today. And the humbler and less ostentatious, the better. Adrian Plass writes of how he remembers his mother going out every evening at 9.30 to push their elderly neighbour up the stairs to bed because she had bad knees. She did this physically demanding and awkward task year after year. She didn't make a fuss of it. She didn't make a big thing of it. She simply served. Not to be served, but to serve. And we are here today, not to be served, but to serve one another. And what holds good here and now must hold good tomorrow in the streets where we live and with our families and friends. Not to be served, but to serve.

### **A servant suffers**

Being a servant is not an easy thing to do. Our reading from the letter to Hebrew Christians states that Jesus suffered as he lived as a human being and obeyed what the Father wanted him to do: "Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered."

He got sore feet, dirty hands, he was laughed at, criticised and threatened. Ultimately he was killed. This suffering had a purpose; it made him perfect for the job of saving all humankind. So we should not be surprised that when we put ourselves last and become a servant we might also suffer. It could mean not always trying to get our own way, letting someone else get all the praise, giving up a career or being overlooked for promotion, getting our hands very dirty...or it might be something much more serious. Our suffering has a purpose, although we may not understand it; but it does mirror God's love to people and shows them what God is really like.

### **A servant looks out for others**

To be servants we need to help each other. In our Gospel reading, Jesus' response to James' and John's request for celebrity status and the best seat in the house was to ask if they were able to be suffering servants like he was: "You have no idea what you're asking," Jesus said. "Are you capable of drinking the cup I drink, of being baptized in the baptism I'm about to be plunged into?"

James and John said 'Yes' without knowing what it would involve: "Sure," they said. "Why not?"

Which brings us to the questions for us today: Are we willing to be suffering servants like Jesus? Are our hearts leaping to say 'yes', whatever that involves?

### **Prayer of confession**

For the times we want to be the centre of attention,  
for the times we only think about ourselves,  
for the times we complain about helping others,  
for the times we can't be bothered to help others –  
forgive us, Lord Jesus, when we don't act like servants

Thank you that you can forgive us,  
because as a servant,  
you died on the cross.

Amen.